

# A Comprehensive Analysis of Sex and Gender

By Mandy Wilkens



with this knowledge, you will be able to analyse situations for yourself. This isn't public knowledge and I don't anticipate it will be anytime soon. The trans movement is an upwards battle against a government and ideology that's completely at odds with who we are and what we represent. Transgender people represent a critique of the patriarchy, health care, poverty, and the entire mode of thinking that dominates our Western-hegemonic world. Science backs us up, history backs us up, and our numbers back us up. Trans oppression has only made us stronger!

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## Introduction

There is a serious lack of good information

about gender. When I first started thinking about this I was put into a tough situation where I was to recommend my workplace a resource that would cover it all. I felt awkward recommending an entire book knowing that nobody would read it and every short article I found had serious flaws. Some were condescending, some were misleading and some were just obviously wrong. The one I had found that was halfway decent had a photo of RuPaul as an example of a drag queen but no actual example of a trans-person (RuPaul is not trans, for those unfamiliar). Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors*, and Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* are phenomenal books<sup>1</sup> but a coworker, parent or community should not need an entire history lecture to understand why they should treat a trans person with respect. Of course our language, science and consciousness are constantly growing and our understanding of gender can quickly become outdated, but my attempt here is to provide an absolutely concrete, materialist and historical analysis of what gender really is, who trans people are and are not, why we are hated and what you can do to help.<sup>2</sup>

[1] See also *You're in the Wrong Bathroom* by Laura Erickson-Schroth and Laura A. Jacobs

[2] This essay is also available in a less-detailed but just as

linked but they most certainly aren't identical!!!

## Use phrases that don't dehumanize trans people

Words like transman or transwoman effectively "third gender" trans people by separating them from men or women. Put a space in between e.g. trans man, trans woman. Avoid derogatory uses of trans terms, like calling someone "transgendered" or slurs. Words like these often cast being trans as a mental illness or some kind of disease and are incorrect and often very hurtful. Trans is not a separate gender.

## Stop Tokenizing Trans People

Trans people deserve to take pride in being trans, and rightfully so. It's also important to be an ally and help fight for their rights and raise public consciousness about trans oppression. But trans people also deserve to live normal lives. They deserve to not be reminded every day that they're trans. They deserve to be treated the same way as everybody else. Tokenizing trans people, or overcompensating is always transparent and can frequently be dehumanizing.

## Conclusion

This is a lot of information, perhaps too much to fully grasp in one sitting, however it is not the end. There's still so much to cover however hopefully

name and pronouns even when referring to them in the past. Trans people's genders don't change when they come out. Very frequently trans people have always felt a certain way, or they are fluid and it's not actually the act of coming out that has changed their gender. Pronouns should always be respected unless the person in question requests or gives permission otherwise. This is especially important when talking about a friend or family member who has recently come out.

### **Avoid framing gender as a choice**

While it's often a decision or choice for a trans person to come out and publicly express their identity, a trans person's gender is something beyond their control. Because gender is the result of one's conditions and experiences, framing it as a choice cheapens the struggle and pain that trans people face every day of their lives. And "transgender" is not something that happens to people, it's an identity that again, is a result of all the conditions and experiences that make a person who they are.

### **Avoid conflating genitals with gender**

Not all women have vaginas, not all men have penises. When you must, try to use phrases like "people with vaginas" or "people with penises". Also avoid associating feminism with vaginal imagery. Feminism and reproductive justice are very closely

Before going into this analysis it's important to address where this understanding of sex and gender comes from. While most discussions of gender are focused on immutable identities and labels, and how we interact with these groups as separate from normal, this is philosophical *idealism*. The idealist conception views certain concepts as eternal and all existing, and in this framework we end up making mistakes like asserting that "boys have always gravitated towards baseball" when baseball is a sport invented by humans, sports were invented by humans, and even humans have not always existed. Philosophical *materialism* is the belief that things don't come out of thin air and that everything has a natural and scientific explanation. Materialism is in essence, the scientific method. Additionally scientific materialism should also be *dialectical materialism* which put crude and simply, is the notion that history develops in phases, through contradictions, and through struggles. The dialectical and materialist methods are those by which we study science through the scientific method, and help explain why boiling liquid water turns into gas not gradually, as dialectics opposite *metaphysics* suggests, but rather in sudden dialectical changes into new phases. This philosophical view of gender and sex will allow us to more deeply study the history and development of these concepts and provide us with an unbiased and

comprehensive presentation hosted here:  
[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1sOI4jB7U\\_kN-9u3uL2d8DzMiR\\_plAn6XlIg5IOy5AF3I](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1sOI4jB7U_kN-9u3uL2d8DzMiR_plAn6XlIg5IOy5AF3I)

true notion of what these really are.

## The Sex/Gender Distinction

The single most important distinction to make when approaching an analysis of gender is the idea that sex and gender are not the same. Despite the fairly clear definition from most major dictionaries (Webster, Oxford, etc) gender is always in reference to the social aspects of “sex” and that the two terms are not interchangeable. Beyond this the language by which we talk and define these terms is constantly changing, especially in the past few decades. As such we need to have definitions of these words that are concrete, material and most importantly scientific.

To begin, *sex* is the distinction of *biological* characteristics that has given rise to the groups *male* and *female*. Because of the nature of biological reproduction these tend to give rise to the general trend of sexual dimorphism, however it would be a gross oversimplification to end there. It’s commonly brought up that intersex people (around 1-2% of the population)<sup>3</sup> do not fit into this binary categorization, their genitals or other features of their bodies not fitting into the legal definitions of what it means to be *male* or *female*. The tragedy of intersex people is

[3] See Freya Browns *On the Social Construction of Sex* in the Anti-Imperialism Blog

## Moving Forward / Putting Ideas to

### Practice

Putting all these ideas into practice can be extremely difficult and it will take time. Reading about trans oppression, science and experiences is important and useful, but will not necessarily lead to actual changes in behaviour. Here’s some tips to think about in daily life:

### Get in the habit of using ungendered words/ pronouns whenever possible

Quite often language unnecessarily enforces a gender binary and often results in the unintentional (or sometimes deliberate) misgendering of trans people. To get more used to pronouns it’s helpful to get in the habit of thinking with “they/them” pronouns until you ask! The more often you do this the easier and more natural it will be, and the less likely you will risk unintentionally misgendering someone, and getting asked about pronouns always feels good!!!

*Avoid:* sir/ma’am, gentleman/woman, brother/sister, dude, man, guy  
*Instead try:* friend, folks, sibling, relative, people

### Names/Pronouns are retroactive

Always refer to a trans person by their preferred

in general in the US right now. Alarminglly the police target trans people enough such that 1 in 6 transgender people have been incarcerated at some point in their lives that's 16% of the overall population, 21% of trans women, and 47% of black transgender people. Trans people are nearly always placed and treated as their assigned sex and thus face not only dehumanization but consequent discrimination, a constant reminder that the legal system sees trans people as subhuman. Trans people often report being denied access to medication (i.e. hormones) or mental health treatment while in prison, causing damage to not only their psyche, but also sometimes permanent damage to their bodies. A frightening 24% of trans people report experiencing sexual abuse compared to 2% in the general prison population this number jumps to 59% for trans women in men's prisons. For trans women in male prisons that's roughly 30x higher than average. Despite these statistics, public opinion seems to still be more concerned about some perceived threat from trans women and chooses to put them in a place where literally more than half will be raped.

For many trans people, prison is a worse fate than death.

that it's medical procedure to "correct" the intersex baby's body so that they will fit binary categories better, without concern for bodily autonomy. But sexual characteristics don't come in packages, and more frequently than not these characteristics manifest in a tremendous amount of diversity in body types, hormone levels, and chromosomal compositions. While staticians have attempted to find models which weight and rank sexual characteristics to provide numerical sum total sexual characteristics, we can not rely on statistics and reductive models to understand our own biology. To understand sex outside of this context we must begin to become aware of our socialized urge to generalize the body as a whole, but rather look at each element as an individual character of a complex and harmonious piece of art. Next time you are in a crowded public place, consider the enormous amount of variety in the shapes of bodies, noses, in the softness of peoples hair and skin, and the innumerable other parts of what make us human.

When we look at *gender* often we're tempted to either completely associate it as the social aspect of sex or reject its relation to sex at all, however neither of these are the correct approach when analysing gender. Gender is the distinction of *social* characteristics that give rise to the groups *masculine* and *feminine*. If it isn't clear from the names of these categories, gender as we know it today has been heavily influenced by our simplified and vulgar

understanding of sex. Gender is represented popularly by the distinction between pink vs. blue, pants vs. dresses, or even semi-biological characteristics like low vs high vocal intonation. The important aspect with this definition though is the idea that gender arises from complex social interactions and because of it's purely social nature, has no "dimorphism" like some sexual characteristics have. The normalized conception of *masculine* and *feminine* as the only categories comes from historical social developments stemming from a division of society under patriarchal lines. Language, for example, has a dialectical relationship with its own development, simultaneously developing with society and developing society itself. These kinds of relationships explains how the social structure of society influences our language, science, and politics and how this changes the way that we look and view gender (and sex). Additionally when we talk about gender we need to talk about how it is experienced in relation to one's *identity* and how it is manifested in a social context, i.e. *expression*. Because gender is purely *socially relative*, we must perform gender based on how we see ourselves in relation to someone else, however how we see ourselves is a process of learning.

Sometimes people will say that *sex* is *socially constructed*. This is not to say that sex as you know it does not exist, but rather that the *gendering* of sex (and

insurance costs, and the lack of education amongst professionals. Medication like PrEP can prevent new cases of HIV/AIDS at 99% effectiveness, however these medications aren't widely distributed and are most certainly not affordable in most cases.

## Identity Documents

Beyond identity documents being difficult to obtain because of costs and complexity, identity documents themselves are their own area of discrimination. Having identity documentation that doesn't match presentation or gender identity regularly results in denial of service or obstruction of employment or travel. Trans people regularly are forced to provide identity documentation that doesn't match their identity and beyond the existential grief, they face harassment, and discrimination, job loss, and sometimes even criminal charges. Because of legal discrimination, family rejection, and overall hostile environments, trans people experience increased costs of living, while simultaneously having less income to pay for these costs, thus trans people are left destitute, and fed into poverty.

## Prison Discrimination

The mistreatment of prisoners is already a harrowing topic, and combined with the oppression of trans people, this is perhaps the most bleak aspect of transgender oppression, and perhaps oppression



affordable housing is difficult as is, and this kind of discrimination forms additional hurdles to an already painful process. Because trans people are also nearly 4 times more likely to experience extreme poverty (34% of black trans people live in extreme poverty), the housing crisis for trans people is even more profound and disturbing.

### Health / HIV / AIDs

Because of the pathologization of gender dysphoria, being transgender is frequently seen as an “existing condition” for medical services. Trans people consequently experience denial of eligibility, coverage, counselling, and medication. Even trans people with coverage might face discrimination, either being told they aren’t trans enough for hormones, or forced to see psychologists who often suggest that their patients are just perverts, or simply traumatized. The MAP report reports that 70% of trans people experience this kind of discrimination in healthcare. Not only this but because trans issues are so rarely talked about, 50% of trans people reported educating their providers themselves. An astounding 20% also reported being denied service entirely. HIV/AIDs is also a pressing issue for trans people, as they are far more likely to be at risk for HIV/AIDs. Today, 1 in 4 black trans person in the US lives with HIV/AIDs. This is intimately linked to the discrimination in healthcare, the astronomical

its scientific developments) is something that is socially constructed. While certain (but not all) sexual characteristics have been grouped into dimorphic pairs *male* and *female*, these categories have no scientific relationship with their social character. A feminine nose, for example, does not make you a better chef. We must resist the urge to apply *gender* to biological traits. Nobody would question someone who considers himself to be a man if he has softer skin than his peers, in the same way we should not be so quick to sexually categorize a trans woman who has a penis, especially considering her genitals may be incredibly feminine. By far the biggest consequence of this is that we must completely reject *absolute dimorphism*, or the sexing of individuals as a whole into two categories. Individual characteristics don’t work this way, and thus whatever sum total of characteristics someone chooses to assign to us clearly cannot fit this mold either. Additionally our lingual structures have lead us to refer to things using “masculine” and “feminine” however another way to think of this is to reject the link between “male” and “masculine” and “female” and “feminine” as being socially constructed and to work towards a more comprehensive and accepting definition. As another example, the hormone testosterone often drops the pitch of a person’s voice, however to define a low voice as “masculine” because testosterone is (socially) defined as a “male” hormone, would be to ignore those who identify with femininity, but have low

voices, or even those with low voices despite their low levels of testosterone. We can only really assign these characteristics *gender*s as they relate to the social functions by which they serve (for better or for worse).

Finally, when considering sex and gender, we almost instinctively drawn to some form of binary language structure, however, as has been outlined above, these words come from the way we organize society, and that science and culture is far more complex than some binary. In her sensational 1993 article “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough?” Anne Fausto-Sterling suggested that when looking purely at the more commonly talked about sexual characteristics (sexual organs and chromosomes), there is actually evidence to support five possible categories for discretizing sex<sup>4</sup>. New science says our sexes are far more complex than just XX and XY as Fausto-Sterling suggested. Hormones, chromosomes, and the known other 25 sexually characterizing genes are just the first step in understanding just how complex we are as people, but also that our sexes are much more likely to be *processes* rather than *assignments*<sup>5</sup>. Not only this, but each characteristic must be looked at as an individual

[4] Anne Fausto-Sterling later revised her article in 2000, reflecting basically what I’m about to say. She’s really great and I recommend all her books!

[5] See Andrea Ford’s *Sex biology redefined: Genes don’t indicate binary sexes* in Stanford’s Scope Blog

when looking at trans people who faced harassment in school. Compare this to the suicide risk of only 1.6% amongst the general population. This statistic is a favorite amongst conservative think-tanks like Ben Shapiro, who smirk as they cite this as proof that being transgender is a mental illness. And it may seem like it if you don’t consider the fact that these numbers drop dramatically in families and environment where people are accepting and caring. This hateful and distorted usage of this statistic ignores the *fact* that trans people are absolutely dejected from normal life. This isn’t the kind of statistic that’s easy to stomach unless you are already comfortable with the kinds of eugenics that these conservatives love so much. These suicides aren’t because of some form of mental pathology; these suicides are murders at the hands of the oppressors.

## Housing and Homelessness

The housing crisis for trans people is profoundly linked to income difficulties for trans people, and thus demonstrates the sheer magnitude of this kind of institutionalized oppression. The MAP report shows that 20% of trans people experience homelessness at some point in their life and that of those 20%, one in three will be denied access to a shelter because of gender discrimination. Another 20% have been rejected housing either by landlords, roommates, or by their families, and 10% have been evicted because of gender discrimination. Finding

details further the discrimination trans high school students face. MAP found that 75.2% of trans kids felt unsafe at school, and that was justified by the 73.6% of trans kids who reported that they were verbally harassed at least once. A disturbing 32.5% were physically harassed, and 16.2% were physically assaulted. Over half avoided bathrooms and locker rooms.

The violence against trans people is heartbreaking. Each year hundreds of trans people across the world are brutally murdered in hate crimes, sometimes even by their own partners. When three quarters of children feel unsafe, wouldn't one think this was an area of extreme concern? These kids don't feel unsafe because of some boutique identity issue, they feel unsafe because there's the constant and looming threat of violence against every corner. They feel unsafe because they live in an unsafe world for them. Trans people must cope and live with this knowledge, they must learn how to suppress the fear.

## Suicide Risk

The statistics above represent the deaths of trans people committed by another hand, however the data doesn't account for deaths by suicide. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey reported that 41% of respondents had attempted suicide at one point in their lives, elevated to 51%

multi-dimensional spectrum, which may or may not correlate with other characteristics. From this perspective our bodies are not binary, or even a binary spectrum, but rather a mosaic of complex interworking processes and characteristics. Each time we've attempted to study sex or gender scientifically we've approached the problem and results in especially problematic ways. Each time a study comes out attempting to show empathy differences as determined by hormone levels<sup>6</sup>, or mathematical capabilities as it relates to prenatal testosterone<sup>7</sup>, we are formulating questions to attach a biological basis to things like gender inequality, attempting to detach ourselves and society from the patriarchy. It's still incredibly common to see gendered brain difference journals and articles cropping up in liberal publications. Apparently we haven't learned that trying to find a biological basis to racial or gender inequality is characteristically Nazi<sup>8</sup> and actually end up being used to justify violence. Not shockingly these "scientific" studies have extremely ungrounded methods and across the board show contradictory

[6] Rueckert, L. (2011). Gender differences in empathy. In *Psychology of Empathy*, 221-234. This is a recent one, but there are dozens of these bogus reports

[7] Lindberg, S. M., Hyde, J. S., Petersen, J. L., & Linn, M. C. (2010). New trends in gender and mathematics performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(6), 1123-1135. This is a study on studies, it's pretty clear here that there's no conclusive evidence...

[8] Adams, Mark B., editor. *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. (HQ 751 .W46 1990); Torrey EF, Yolken RH. Psychiatric genocide: Nazi attempts to eradicate schizophrenia. *Schizophr Bull*. 2009;36(1):26-32.

messages'. This is not to say sex doesn't exist, prenatal testosterone is real and has an effect on our bodies. There are concrete differences in our bodies, but when we study how these manifest in our world we need to be looking at concrete and scientific parameters rather than empathy indexes or what kind of baby monkeys like "boyish" or "girlish" toys<sup>10</sup> (whatever that means).

When we factor *gender* into the sex discourse we must consider the historical urge and pressures to adapt to the social function by which a person serves. As social creatures, we're incredibly adept at changing the way we act or look to fit into particular social scenarios or trends. Not only is sex a process of biology, but it's also a process of society. Our diets, exercise, stress, and even things like socioeconomic class all inform our biologies. Of course, because gender is explicitly socially constructed, this same concept applies much more easily. The way we perform our gender is extremely circumstantial. Just as one example, we often perform our genders far more when we're trying to get the attention of someone we're attracted to. But

[9] Honestly just search "sex differences meta analysis" and you'll find analysis of thousands of contradictory articles on topics ranging from "friendship expectations" to "cooking ability".

[10] Hasset, J. M., Siebert, E. R., & Wallen, K. (2008). Sex differences in rhesus monkey toy preferences parallel those of children. *Hormones and Behavior*, 54(3), 359-364. This study describes pots as a feminine toy....

for trans people, and this isn't without consequences. In some sense this is the most critical part of understanding what it means to be trans because our oppression has shaped our movements, it has shaped the way we understand ourselves and it has shaped the way we respond to our oppressors.

## Violence / Discrimination

It's nearly impossible to hear a discussion of trans people without hearing about the enormous amounts of violence and discrimination they face. Whether it be by small forms of discrimination faced everyday by trans people like getting laughed at or called slurs on the street, or by acts of extreme hatred like murder or rape, trans people are across the board far more likely to experience oppression. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs put together a Hate Report in 2013 which outlines this. The report states that trans people are far more likely to experience threats, intimidation, harassment, discrimination and sexual violence. The report also describes how trans people of color are particularly vulnerable, especially at the hands of those who are supposed to be protecting us, the law enforcement. The report shows that in 2013, over half the LGBT homicide violence victims were trans women of color. Trans women of color in the united states have a life expectancy of only 31 years old. The Movement Advancement Project (MAP) provides another report *Understanding Transgender Issues* written in 2016 which

gendered oppression and absolutely refuse to accept that there are men who can give birth (transgender *or* intersex!). This stance also actively supports bathroom bills to keep trans people out of the bathrooms that they feel most comfortable in, often citing outrageous and completely unfounded statistics that 90% of trans women are rapists, and that its not gendered power structures that cause rape, but rather some kind of biological urge (usually stemming from penises). Someone who is transgender may identify as trans but the act of being transgender is informed by experience. Identity may or may not be a choice depending on the circumstances for trans people but experience is never a choice and regardless of identity, expression or any other gendered behaviour, trans people have *always* experienced trans oppression, women's oppression or whatever else these arguments choose to deny people. Rather than excluding trans people, we should be listening to them and choosing to stay on the side of anybody who experiences violence or oppression: unification rather than division.

## Transgender Oppression

(c.w. suicide, harassment, sexual assault, homelessness)

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Unfortunately one can't understand the experience of being trans without understanding transgender oppression. Every day is a grim reality

these aren't just processes over our days or lifetimes, but these structures have been changing in every epoch of history. This is most obvious in the way that in all languages, but particularly in gendered languages like French or Spanish, how structures are gendered despite having absolutely no relation to sex. The distinction between colors, different music genres or even tastes in food are frequently gendered in a way that is entirely social, relying on stereotypes or pseudo-scientific psychology to back them up. Just as "male" and "female" are not enough to describe sex, "masculine" and "feminine" are not the natural categories by which gender can be adequately discussed. Language like "masc/butch" or "femme" originated historically in lesbian circles, however these terms in the context of gender have morphed into another binary. Although this time more "inclusive" we're still stuck in this binary thinking. While we have words like *non-binary*, *agender*, or *genderfluid* we still need to subscribe to speaking outside of a system rather than creating our own. One Eastern Navajo tribe has nearly 53 separate and unique words describing specific genders, with 4 major categories of genders<sup>11</sup>. Historically we see that most languages have begun with such expanded vocabulary, only to have it buried with the conquest of patriarchy. We are at the beginning of a turning point in our language and culture. Who knows how

[11] See Leslie Feinberg *Transgender Warriors* for an extensive history of alternative genders and how they were repressed with the introduction of capital accumulation.

we will be describing ourselves decades in the future but it's crucial that we move along with it.

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## Beyond Sexuality and Gender

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The inevitable question that comes up, whether consciously or subconsciously for anybody coming to grips with this material is: what does this mean for my sexuality? Nearly anytime sexuality is mentioned in media there's some kind of reference to genitals. Our attraction and intercourse has become so intertwined in what's between our legs that it's become difficult to imagine another way to express sexuality. If you're attracted to boys, you're attracted to penis, and if you're attracted to women, you're attracted to vagina, but how do trans people fit into the mix? This genital-centric view of sexuality is ripe with contradictions, however it's so ingrained into our culture that people will often go to extreme lengths to defend it (as we'll see later, often resorting to extreme violence). In reality genitals are usually only an afterthought in daily attractions. People are far more inclined to be attracted to things like, smell, hair, sense of fashion, or body-shape, and often these attractions are purely superficial and can make completely irrelevant by much stronger attractions like personality, values, or common experiences. Within this context, *sex* plays only a small role in

## 5. Are trans women are still “males” who just identify as women?

(*c.m. rape mention*)

This myth is especially dangerous, and it is the mantra of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (or TERFs). This stance allows people to perform pseudo-radicalism, or some kind of faux-solidarity with trans people while simultaneously hosting a heinously flawed and archaic stance on sex and especially gender. This believe is completely rooted in viewing being transgender as solely an identity, while biology informs “socialization”. The implications are usually that trans women contribute to the violent patriarchy and that transitioning is a means to either escape the blame for misogyny or to to escape experiencing women's oppression. The irony here is that the “radical feminism” piece of being a TERF should ideally reject any kind of biological basis for informing gender differences, however they still claim that our socialization is entirely informed by at least perceptions of biology. Because of this TERFs generally agree that gender is a social construct, however refuse to accept that women's oppression is a function of gender, and *not* biology<sup>18</sup>. They generally lump feminist reproductive justice and

[18] See Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Myths of Gender* or Cordelia Fine's *Delusions of Gender* which clearly lay out that the differences between “men” and “women” as it's laid out by TERFs and eugenicists alike are far more likely to be *social* rather than *biological*. In fact a biological explanation for differences between “sexes” seems extremely antithetical to the entire notion of what feminism is!

debate on who really constitutes a woman. Very rarely is there discussion on the violence trans women face in men's bathrooms and very rarely is there discussion on the violence against trans men overall. Not only is it completely unfounded that trans women are the perpetrators of bathroom violence (in fact on average, they are less violent!), but in reality if those debating were so concerned about safety they would be focusing on discrimination. This is amplified by the fact that most of the so-called "bathroom bills" actually focus on the much more broad public accommodations instead. In addition to allowing for discrimination in bathrooms, these places also allow for discrimination to occur in other public places, whether that be train stations, public parks, or even restaurants. But what about the cis people who might pretend to be trans to perpetrate violence? A better question might be, what's stopping them from doing so otherwise? These protections don't legalize violence in bathrooms, they don't legalize invasions of privacy, and they most certainly aren't going to embolden actual perpetrators, these "bathroom bills" and the debates that followed are a form of plain and simple transphobia, most certainly not for anyone's "safety".

*sexuality*, as sexuality is a much broader attraction to an entire subset of social attractions, *gender*, *sex*, and *interpersonal relationships*.

As our definitions of *gender* and *sex* have become more broad and scientific so too does our definition of *sexualities*. While some people see it as a dichotomy of *gay* and *straight*, in reality our notion of sexuality has historically extended far beyond these two erroneously specific terms. As Friedrich Engels explains in his famous 1884 *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, we as humans developed *monogamy* through the formation of the formation of individual households and family units which formed as a result of the generalized ability of certain sexes' ability to reproduce<sup>12</sup>. While initially these family units were matrilineal and in nearly every society included transgender people as regular if not leaders of communities, the formation of capital extraction through surplus goods (food preservation, building materials, etc) and a scarcity of human labor lead to the scarcity of "females" and thus the origins of women's oppression and patriarchy. Here we see several interesting developments in history, the naturalization of *monogamy*, *heterosexuality*, *gender-roles* (thus *gender itself*), and *the sexing of individuals*. These were all further ratified broadly by the Abrahamic

[12] Engels didn't necessarily come to these conclusions, as the LGBT struggle was heavily oppressed and repressed during his time of writing (this is more indicative in some of his rather racist language), however the conclusions he draws are really interesting in the lense of the social development of sexuality and gender and it's direct relationship to capital accumulation and class development.

religions, specifically Christian conquest and the rise of feudalism. Even coming into the 19th century, many communal societies, especially some American indigenous peoples, still maintained group marriages, fluid gender roles, and community based parenting. Engles also notes and provides ample examples of *polyamory*, *similar-sex love*, and *gender-fluidity* in the animal kingdom. All of this is to say that our sexualities are far more complex than the simplistic notion of a two-sex two-sexuality system, and that actually these complex sexualities and genders are in fact natural responses to the social structure we live under.

Sexuality manifests in the real world as *straight*, *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual* and *asexual*. To be straight is to only be attracted to different genders, although this is most commonly exclusive to “masculine” and “feminine”. To be gay is often used broadly to describe all sexualities that *aren't straight*, however more traditionally it has been used to describe “masculine-masculine” attraction. Similarly lesbian is used to describe “feminine-feminine” attraction. To be *bisexual* is to be attracted to both similar genders and different genders. *Pansexuality* was introduced to combat bisexuality as historically being defined as attraction to “both sexes” however, the bisexual movement for the most part rejects that definition and thus the terms have become indistinguishable. Asexuality is the lack of attraction to any gender.

“Frank and Sally just left, they went to the store” but unconsciously we probably use they/them pronouns in the singular on a regular basis and never even question it. Say your roommate brings up that *they* met someone who knew you on the train, you might ask: “who were *they*?”. Sometimes people try to force the use of “he or she” (I’ve even seen “he or she or they”) but it’s far more clunky than just saying *they* which is supposedly what they’re trying to avoid. In the previous example, could you imagine saying “who was he or she?”... yikes! Not only that but Webster, Oxford, Dictionary.com and probably any other dictionary you can find describes the usage of the singular they because it’s a word we’ve nearly always used in English. If you’re still uncomfortable with the grammar aspect of “they/them” pronouns you can kindly take your grammar elitism somewhere else, because you’re both wrong and behind the times. Languages can evolve, and it doesn’t even matter if this is one of those cases or not: “they/them” pronouns are here to stay.

#### 4.The Bathroom Debate

The bathroom focuses primarily on the question of “safety”. But safety for whom? Even in more liberal focused media it’s always “women and children” but why then are the voices of trans women always left out of this discussion? The clear bias here is that these debates are only thinly veiled in conversations about safety, however in reality this is a



services that are provided for trans people, some non-binary people have to wonder, are they really as trans as their trans sisters and brothers, especially the ones who are undergoing medical transition? The root of this issue lies in the framework of how transgender issues are nearly always presented in the media: as an *identity* rather than an *experience*. Whether it be conservative media focusing on trans people as being college students with dyed hair, or liberal media talking about whether we should fight for the basic human rights of “trans-identified” people, we’re always presented with “trans” as presentation. Before trans people “come out” as trans (that is, begin to publicly *identify* as trans), they *experience* being transgender. If they didn’t, how would they know they were trans in the first place? Non-binary people are no different. The trans experience presents a contradiction in non-binary people that’s absolutely identical to that of so-called “binary” trans people. While some non-binary people choose to present differently, there are many cases where they don’t, but this has absolutely no bearing on whether or not they are any more or less trans than their neighbors.

The other myth is maybe more common, even by those in the trans community. They/them pronouns are commonly used in the plural, i.e.

November 20th remembering Rita Hester, a trans woman who was murdered in her Allston apartment in 1998. It has spread internationally and has evolved to be in remembrance of all the transgender people (usually with emphasis on trans women) who have been murdered around the world.

Typically left out of the conversation is the notion that these are all fluid in everybody. A simple example of this is the tendency to become more attracted to our partners and aspects of them as we date them and the tendency to distance ourselves from aspects of those who have hurt us. But there is no one gender for man or woman, and thus our notions of gay or lesbian are actually far more diverse than “being attracted to one gender” and in fact encompass things like butches, femmes, twinkies and bears<sup>13</sup>. Gender extends far beyond “masculine” and “feminine” and sexuality is much broader than just gender and sex, and thus rather than reject these terms as a whole, these terms tend to be use as historical legacies of previously oppressed identities, especially given that the LGBT+ movement as a whole is still deeply oppressed and stigmatized. To answer the original question proposed at the beginning of this section: seeing beyond genitals and beyond gender and a move to examine more closely the subtleties of attraction will likely lead to a much larger portion (if not majority) of the population experiencing more bisexuality.

## Why *Transgender*?

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Transgender, put extremely simply, is the

[13] Whether these things actually encompass separate genders is a debate for another time, my point is however that even within masculinity or femininity there’s gender variation that can’t be accounted for with the language we use.

experience of a gender that contradicts that which has been assigned. Because we know that gender is *social*, it therefore must be *learned*. In fact, evidence suggests certain dimorphic sex traits like hormone levels typically manifest in very low levels in childhood, only being produced on a large scale during puberty. Without an obvious an obvious biological source of gender, we have to assume that nearly all experiences of gender in the first several years of life are due to the gendering through our legal, *assigned sex*. The assignment of sex at birth, as stated previously is ignorant to the process of sex, and is entirely blind to the distinction between sex and gender. With an imposed legal sex and typically an imposed gender that follows along with that, children are practically forced to grow up in a certain way. When children first become conscious of how gender is manifesting in their lives they typically already have a full wardrobe, fully decorated living space, and in most cases these are heavily gendered. Children, especially transgender children are simply normalized to this as they learn about the world, language and themselves. These experiences continue to build upon themselves, as the parents attempt to lead their child through what they see as a socially acceptable path, whether that be through sports or superheroes for “boys” or dolls and princesses for “girls”. How can we say we are biologically inclined to gravitate towards these gendered toys when we

trans oppression. In a world where trans people aren't oppressed, there is no such thing as passing, as there would be no reason to even want to “pass” whatever that even means in this hypothetical. This idea becomes dangerous pretty quickly when people start to assign trans people as “passing” or not. Passing exists in the public sphere, however there are many different public environments, and billions of people on this planet. There is no metric for passing because it's different in every space and in every moment. This dangerous way of thinking about passing rewards binary behaviors, and also creates another hierarchy by which trans people can be judged and oppressed. All trans people, whether they can “pass” or not, should be treated with the same amount of respect, the respect that they deserve.

### 3. Myths around Non-Binary / Gender Non-Conforming People

This section could be a whole additional pamphlet but two major myths are as follows: “non-binary people aren't fully transgender”, and “they/them pronouns are grammatically incorrect” and we need new pronouns”. The first one is a distortion that comes up with questions of who should be considered trans, allowed to speak on trans issues, or use trans-specific services. Whether it be a non-binary person speaking at a Trans Day of Remembrance<sup>17</sup> event, or using one of the many legal

[17] Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is an event every

above all is being more of who you see yourself to be, but when trans people are constantly comparing themselves to others in order to justify their own existence, they damage their sense of who they really are. In the same way, the constant projection of other people onto a trans person is absolutely annoying, but above all it's a constant reminder that trans people are seen as monolithic and uniform rather than as individuals like anybody else. Not all trans people are good at makeup, not all trans people are emotionally vulnerable and not all trans people are emotionally strong. Every trans person is unique in the same way we're all different, whether we're trans or not. Perhaps every trans person has had experiences with this in one way or another<sup>16</sup>, but perhaps the most common way this is expressed is through the notion of "passing".

Passing is pretty simply the concept of being seen as your intended gender. Generally however people use passing to refer to the notion of not being seen as trans in public. Why is this important? Because trans people are oppressed in public. If you pass, not only will you go unnoticed by most people, but you won't be misgendered, you might have people check you out or cat call you, and everything else that for better or for worse affirms your gender. But passing can only really be defined relative to

[16] A piece I wrote about my own experiences with this:

<https://link.medium.com/Z4WCXWbkoS>

aren't really given a chance not to?

Our gender is something everybody experiences whether we are conscious of it or not. While we know that sex can be estimated through studying an individual's biology, gender is something that is strictly *introspective*. The only person who knows how they experience gender is the one experiencing it in the first place. Everytime we buy clothes, get haircuts, or prepare for a job interview we subconsciously are thinking about our gender. We're constantly learning what we like, what we don't like and what we wish we had, and it further evolves each of our individual genders. In a gendered society we have limited choices to choose from, however we're trained to find what we like the most. There's a certain acceptable limit to the clothes we can wear, ways we can talk, or the multitude of other social dimensions that gender manifests as. When we cross those boundaries we are viewed as "gender outlaws" as Leslie Feinberg puts it in *Transgender Warriors*. When we see masculine gender crossing, it's viewed as tomboyish, and is to a degree socially acceptable as long as it's not rooted in someone's identity, however feminine gender crossing is nearly always seen as a deep and disturbing perversion. Because of this we're taught to repress these kinds of gender expressions, and for most people, it's not that big of a deal, however for some people this kind of repression is a violent attack on how they see themselves.

Because gender is *introspective*, other people can't determine your gender for you. Additionally gender isn't a physiological experience like hunger, or mood in that we can't measure gender and we can't "feel" gender beyond our experience of it. These are both exactly similar to our experiences of sexuality because both gender and sexuality are both *socially relative* experiences. There is no "gay gene" just as there is no "trans gene"<sup>14</sup>. However as a society we're taught that we *can* determine someone else's gender based either upon how we gender their perceived sex or how we gender their expression. When how we're socially gendered comes into contradiction with how we introspectively gender ourselves we are *transgender*. When we become aware that these contradictions manifest themselves in a way problematic to our identity, our identity becomes *transgender*. A *cisgender* person doesn't experience this contradiction in the same way however gender isn't a monolithic experience and so it's likely that most cisgender people have had some degree of transgender experiences (i.e. a cisgender boy with long hair being mistaken for a girl). For a multitude of reasons, whether that be fear of oppression, or just because of how we're feeling on a certain day, our expressions

[14] Like mentioned before, because sex and gender have had historically dialectical relationship in their mutual development, there are actually behaviours that can be to some degree attributed to biology, however these don't manifest themselves in different "brain types" or a specific genetic structure.

dollars. Beyond the court order though, there are banks, diplomas, birth certificates, social security cards, licenses, insurance, work documents, and a multitude of online accounts. The entire process is lengthy and expensive, and thus while it is seen as important for a lot of trans people, it's often barring for many, especially considering in most places gender is only "M" or "F".

## 2.The "Ideal" Trans Person

The media representation of trans people, while often a step in the right direction, is the primary influencer for what cis people see as trans people. Whether it be Caitlyn Jenner, Chelsea Manning, or some new Netflix TV show, trans people in the media are projected onto the trans people in our lives. Because the trans people on TV are so frequently shown as well off, happy, and typically very binary, these ideals are enforced unconsciously by society onto trans people. In a very similar way to the body-image issues that beauty magazines have created, these "trans icons" are creating the template for what it means to be trans. For trans women, you must have long hair, be proper and polite and medically transition. For trans men, media representation simply does not exist, however the ones you do see have big muscles and beards. These caricatures of trans people not only damage our notions of what transgender even means but also how trans people grow and develop. Being trans

transgender. Social transitioning is also something that's gradual, and most certainly won't happen overnight. Changing your name and pronouns might be a decision that takes months for someone to move forward with and it takes years to actually implement. Dysphoria isn't a one size fits all kind of affliction, some have it sharply, while others might not feel it very much at all. More importantly the goal of social transition and transitioning as a whole is not only to change the way you see and treat yourself, but also to create the conditions that allow others to see and treat yourself the way that you see yourself. In more philosophical terms, the goal of transition is to relieve the contradiction between introspective gendering and social gendering, and this contradiction can only be resolved through taking the dominant position in the struggle in resolution.

Legal transitioning is fairly straightforward in concept, but not at all in reality. Changing one's name and gender on state IDs (especially in the United States) is a very difficult process. To even begin this process one needs a court order that provides some form of legal precedent that you're name is legally recognized, but in some states this requires a psychological exam, or a newspaper clipping which proves your new name. Hearings are also sometimes required for people changing their name and this whole process can take months to complete in addition to the expense of hundreds of

don't necessarily indicate anything about our identities. In a perfect world the way we are treated or socially related to would be such that we as individuals want, matching our identities rather than our expressions or the socially acceptable limits of masculine and feminine. Thus for transgender people, our goal is not to become cis as it is socially defined, but rather to ease the contradiction between our introspective and social gendering. In this sense we must look at all people as having complex experiences and identities and learn to respect and appreciate each other for these rather than impose our views of what is or isn't "socially acceptable"<sup>15</sup>.

## Common Myths/Questions about Trans People

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Having the right theory and ideas is never enough when it comes to developing concrete knowledge of something. We also have to see how things manifest in the real world, and from there modify what we know to better fit what we've learned in practice. When we apply that to our knowledge of gender and sex we quickly see that the extremely complex discussion of gender in the real world need to be examined with real world evidence and statistics. If you take anything from the first few sections of this writing it should be clear that time

[15] Exceptions like pedophilia actually violate this rule because these identities are rooted in non-consensual and oppressive behaviours.

pushes us forward and that the only way to move forward is to reject what holds us back. This section will touch upon the most common myths or questions about trans people, all of which can be understood and ratified through the framework described above, but must additionally be combated with real world evidence.

### 1. What does it mean to “transition”?

Transitioning is such a broad word it’s become extraordinarily confusing. It’s got trans right in the word but if you aren’t transitioning are you still trans? To lay things out there are many different ways to transition but the most commonly talked about ones are: *social*, *medical* and *legal*. Medical transitioning is perhaps the most misunderstood area of transitioning discourse, and is often incorrectly seen as the primary mode of transition. While when most people think of medical transition they might think of genital gender-affirming surgery or as it’s sometimes referred to: “the surgery”. This is by far the most extreme form of transitioning, and historically it’s been the most commonly talked about. In 1953 Christine Jorgensen became a high profile case of genital gender-affirming surgery, and one of the first trans people to get spotlight in international media on such a scale, and thus this kind of surgery was permanently associated with the notion of being transgender as a whole. This is not, however, the case. Genital gender-

affirming surgery is only one form of gender-affirming surgery, others including breast augmentation, chest masculinization, facial feminization, vocal surgeries, and a wide variety of other surgeries. Trans people might not even be interested in these kinds of surgeries. With body-positivity and the normalization of trans people in the media, trans people are often opting out of changing the ways their bodies look surgically. With hormone replacement therapy (HRT) being another more common form of medical transition, surgical transition is often pushed aside for being too expensive and extreme of a form of transition. Further medical transition is most certainly not a necessity for trans people to be defined as trans and more and more frequently we are seeing trans people who don’t intend to medically transition at all.

Social transitioning is a far more common form of transition. Changing pronouns, names (socially) and sometimes even presenting differently are all different ways that people can socially transition. Because there are so many different ways to socially transition there is no way to define what it means to fully socially transition and what is required of trans people in this regard. Typically socially transitioning to some degree is the definition of what it means to publicly *identify* as transgender, however one can also introspectively identify as transgender or even experience being transgender without knowing it. Thus socially transitioning is not a necessary to be